Using Shared Reading to Promote Inferencing

Jessica Rhoades

Wilmington College

Abstract

Shared readings are a great way to begin teaching and modeling inferencing strategies. Children as young as three to five (Van Kleeck) and as old as eighth grade (Fisher, Frey & Lapp) can learn to make inferences during shared readings and think alouds. Emergent inferencing concepts would be read aloud questioning and the “How Do You Know” strategy (Richards & Anderson, 2003). Older children can take those same emergent inferencing strategies learned during early elementary years and apply them toward more developed strategies that become very specific.

Imagine reading a story and not being able to tell anyone about it, solely because you can’t remember what you read. Comprehension, in my opinion, is and has been a huge problem for readers of all ages. While there are many components that make up comprehension, the most important is being able to infer information. Inferencing is described as the “strategic process of generating assumptions, making predictions, and coming to conclusions based upon given information in text and illustrations” (Richards & Anderson, 2003, p290). Inferencing is something, I believe, that gets left out of comprehension strategies, but is the easiest to teach, model and administer. There are many opportunities to teach or model inferencing, and the resources necessary to administer is as simple as a book and an inquisitive personality. As a pre-service teacher and mother, I have seized those teachable moments to introduce and administer inferencing strategies through shared readings. Shared readings are considered interactive read alouds with a think aloud process (Fisher et al., 2008, p549).

In my field experience, I observed that schools seem very determined to teach children to comprehend their text. Most of these students were given a story to read and then a list of questions to answer. I have noticed that many children of all ages have trouble with answering questions about the text they just read. Frustration seems to set in and the children seem to just shut down. While speaking with some of the children, I learned they do remember certain important aspects about the story but fail to use the important information to make inferences. In my opinion, there was a lack of inferencing strategies put into place that encouraged students to take particular information from the text and illustrations to make predictions. Teachers and parents alike are key resources when it comes to modeling the concept of inferencing (Fisher et al., 2008). Therefore, teachers and parents should model inferencing to further comprehension of text and illustrations through shared readings.

Many libraries across the country participate in book clubs and story time for emergent readers. Van Kleeck (2008) spoke about how natural the inferencing process during story time can be and how beneficial it can be for children at the preschool level. My favorite past time thus far as a mother is story time with my daughters. Every week, my oldest daughter utilizes the local library’s reading program and participates in the preschool story time. The librarian chooses two to three stories that have a similar theme or concept and reads them aloud to the children. The librarian pauses frequently throughout the story and involves the children by asking questions and creating dialogue between her (librarian) and the other children about important events in the text and illustrations. Even though all of these children are at the preschool level, three to five year old can begin to foster the strategies necessary to infer information and ultimately begin to comprehend the text. In fact, Van Kleeck (2008) discussed instances from studies that show that skills necessary for reading can be found as early as age four and if those skills aren’t encouraged than it is likely the child will be behind, and in often times, stay behind. In addition, Van Kleeck (2008) described that family story time is more common in middle-class European American families and these children seem to foster “higher levels of reasoning that is required for inferencing” (p629). This is why it is important to encourage story time in families with “children at risk for later reading comprehension, language disorders, lower ses, and non-native English speakers” (van Kleeck, 2008, p628). Teaching skills that foster inferencing at the preschool level could bridge the gap that often is present in older grades when it comes to comprehension.

Shared readings, such as story time, don’t have to be limited to the preschool environment or the age brackets of three to five. There are many opportunities to encourage inferencing strategies in the elementary grades to further comprehension. Shared readings are a great example of teaching inferencing strategies in the early grades. Once children have learned to read, they can choose stories and create their own predictions and then share that prediction with others. Shared reading does not have to be independent reading; it can range from read alouds in class to book clubs. A great example of teaching inferencing strategies would for the teacher to model what inferencing should look and sound like. For instance, a teacher chooses a story and reads it aloud to the class, pausing every so often, especially after important events to talk about it. The teacher would offer his or her prediction or thoughts about the story and explain why they feel that way, pulling information from the text and illustrations (Fisher et al., 2008). The teacher should continue to model this inferencing strategy, gradually encouraging the students to make their own predictions and pull their ideas from the text and illustrations. Think aloud strategies to encourage inferencing can be

Think Aloud Strategies

* Activating background
* Summarizing
* Predicting
* Clarifying
* Questioning
* Visualizing
* Monitoring
* Synthesizing
* Evaluating
* Connecting

Adapted from (Fisher et al., 2008, p.550)

An interesting strategy that encourages inferencing and allows the teacher to model what inferencing should look like is the “How Do You Know” strategy developed by Richards & Anderson (2003). This strategy includes the teacher providing examples of inferencing during a reading by pulling information from the text or illustrations to make a prediction about the story. Using this strategy’s “read aloud questioning” encourages dialect among the students which promotes cooperative learning, which is a huge part of my own personal teaching style. During the “read aloud questing” the teacher will allow students to explain their predictions and then offer the question: “How Do You Know?” Students should be able to explain their predictions based on what they have read or experienced while looking at the illustrations. Richards & Anderson (2003) documented the benefits of cooperative learning and the opportunity for alternative assessments found with using this strategy and how it “helps emergent readers focus their attention on important information that is explicitly stated in storybooks and depicted in their illustrations” (p.291).

Older or proficient readers can also benefit from shared readings while fostering strategies necessary for inferencing to further comprehension. It seems to me that in older grades, teachers focus on more extensive content while having shared readings. At this point, around second or third grade, shared readings can be more than just the teacher utilizing story time as a point to model inferencing. Shared readings can model children reading various books silently or to each other and then verbally or in written style, voicing their inferences and connections found within the text or illustrations. I have personally experienced this sort of shared readings in my field work and thought it worked very well. Fisher, Frey, & Lapp (2008) conducted a study that tested the necessity of shared readings in the classroom and how important it is for teachers to model appropriate strategies necessary for inferencing that uses other components of reading. The method used by (Fisher et al., 2008) concentrated on interactive read-alouds used in grades 3-8 that had expertise in shared readings. The researchers’, Fisher et al., (2008) findings suggested that “expert teachers should focus their modeling during shared reading on four categories: comprehension, vocabulary, text structures, and text features” (p.548). This study is a great example of what I have seen out in the field. Shared readings are still very present; however, students are taught to draw inferences from many other text components to further their comprehension.

Comprehension is composed of a collection of inferencing strategies encouraged at a very young age that broaden into a great understanding of the process of reading. The transition from non-readers to proficient readers occurs using the strategies related to shared readings and think alouds. My personal mapping concept to chart inferencing transitions between ages and grades would like this: (adapted from Fisher et al., (2008), Richards & Anderson (2003), Van Kleeck (2008)]

Concentrate on comprehension, vocab, text structure, and text feature

Model inferencing strategies on more extensive reading specifics.

Independent reading and sharing thoughts with peers verbally or written.

Older Readers

Encourage students to make connections to the text or illustrations. Make predictions.

Model Inferencing Strategies

Story Time via library, classroom or home.

Emergent Readers

Inferencing Strategies

Shared Reading

When considering how to teach inferencing to further comprehension abilities, students need to see this modeled (Fisher et al., 2008). The models the students need are indeed first the parent and then the teacher. Simple story times are the foundation for modeling and teaching inferencing strategies. These same strategies can be fostered and transitioned into more specific reading concepts for older readers. A task as simple as taking a child to story time at your local library and encouraging story time at home will begin the comprehension process that will continue to grow throughout the child’s academic career. Shared readings at home and in school will continue to encourage the use of inferencing strategies to future comprehension.

References

Fisher, D., Frey, N. & Lapp, D. (2008). Shared readings: modeling comprehension, vocabulary,

text structures, and text features for older readers. *The Reading Teacher, 61(7),* 548-556.

Richards, J.C., and Anderson, N.A. (2003). How do you know? A strategy to help emergent

readers make inferences. *The Reading Teacher*, *57(3),* 290-293.

Van Kleeck, A. (2008). Providing preschool foundations for later reading comprehension: the

importance of and ideas for targeting inferencing in storybook-sharing interventions. *Psychology in the Schools, 45(7),* 627-643.